

August 15, 1974

Dr. Robert Merton
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Dear Bob,

It turns out that the reference I gave you No.99 does not include what I thought it did: namely the remarks about significance of attaching binomial names in encouraging reporting of research on Salmonella. I suspect it may be either in some other paper or in some correspondence that will take me some time to dig out or perhaps I will not be able to. In any case, this is something that we could enlarge upon as a chapter in our book since we have a legitimate handle to it on account of the role that the natural history of Salmonella played in forethinking about recombination.

Looking for that material brought to mind two other situations where that issue also arose, although again I cannot easily document it as fully as I would like. One of them is represented by my correspondence with Waldo Cohn and at some point perhaps only in conversation I do not remember, I did bring up the point that it would be difficult to persuade my colleagues to use a one-letter notation when several years work would thus be truncated into a very brief code. Perhaps some of that is in my correspondence with Crick which is hinted at in the material I am sending you.

I had some rather similar thoughts in mind, but again may not have recorded them in connection with the notation for organic molecular structures that is reflected in the second group of enclosed correspondence. However, this time the suggestion was rejected by the JACS and I suppose with some justice and I did not think it worthwhile to pursue the matter any further. I really have not been one to want to push nomenclature although as you know have not been reticent to suggest it. There is, of course, another side to this story, namely that efficient codes do not always lend themselves to easy mnemonics but I am sure you will agree that this is not the whole story. If I pick up anything more on this question, I will send it on to New York.

Sincerely yours,

Joshua Lederberg
Professor of Genetics

JL/rr